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Conserving South Carolina's At-Risk Species:

Species facing threats to their survival

Ocmulgee skullcap

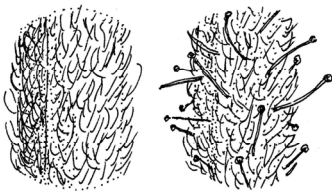
(*Scutellaria ocmulgee*)



Ocmulgee skullcap / Alan Cressler

Description

Ocmulgee skullcap is a perennial herb with stems, usually 4-8 dm tall, arising from knotty rhizomes. Flowers are dull-to violet-blue with white splotches and are arranged in terminal clusters. The plants bloom late June-early October. Several skullcaps occur in Ocmulgee skullcap habitat but none have both pointed hairs and knob-tipped hairs on the upper stem.



pointed hairs and knob-tipped hairs on stem

Adapted from Georgia Department of Natural Resources - Rare Plant Species Profiles: http://georgiawildlife.com/sites/default/files/uploads/wildlife/nongame/pdf/accounts/plants/scutellaria_ocmulgee.pdf. Illustration by J. C. Putnam H.

Hairy skullcap's (*Scutellaria elliptica*) leaves are rough-hairy, and its flowers are usually less than 1 cm long. Heart-leaved skullcap (*S. ovata*) has only long, down-curved hairs on the upper stem. Little is known about Ocmulgee skullcap's life history but it does reproduce sexually. Other skullcap species are typically pollinated by long-tongued bees and moths. Wasps are known to cut holes in the base of some skullcap flower tubes and suck out nectar without carrying out the pollination that bees do.

Range

The plant is only known from Georgia and South Carolina, occurring along the Oconee, Ocmulgee, and Savannah Rivers and their tributaries. In South Carolina, Ocmulgee skullcap is known from Aiken and Edgefield counties.

Habitat

Endemic to eastern Georgia and adjacent South Carolina, it is known from about 20 widely separated localities. It can be found in areas of moist hardwood forests on stream terraces, slopes, and bluffs, usually with a northern or eastern aspect and in calcium-rich soils along waterways. Plants need gaps or disturbance to flower.

Status

NatureServe gives Ocmulgee skullcap a Rounded Global Status of G2 - Imperiled. The Global Status was last reviewed on June 16, 2015. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was petitioned to list the species in April 2010 and in September 2011, issued a 90-day finding that the petition presented substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that listing may be warranted. The species is being reviewed for possible listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Threats

Threatened with destruction of habitat by logging and clearing, significant habitat loss has occurred, especially due to river-side housing developments. In addition, invasion by exotic pest plant species such as Japanese honeysuckle, Chinese privet, and autumn olive threaten this species. Over-browsing by deer is also a threat.

Management/Protection Needs

The species benefits from programs to preserve and enhance wetlands. Such programs should be encouraged for conservation of Ocmulgee skullcap. Prevent clearcutting and development on river bluffs and stream terraces. Eradicate exotic pest species such as wild hogs, Japanese honeysuckle, Chinese privet, and autumn olive. Continue survey efforts to clarify status.

References

Bradley, Keith A. (2019). *Status Survey of Scutellaria ocmulgee in Southeast Georgia and Adjacent South Carolina. Unpublished report to Georgia Department of Natural Resources.*

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